

2. (PSEUDO-)HERODOTUS ON HOMER'S ORIGINS, DATE, AND LIFE

Herodotus of Halicarnassus has produced this account of Homer's origins, date, and life, endeavoring to pursue the questions to the most accurate conclusion.

When the old Aeolian Cyme was being founded, there came together in it every kind of Hellenic people. Among those that came from Magnesia was Melanopus, son of Ithagenes the son of Crethon, not with a great deal of baggage, but with modest means. This Melanopus married at Cyme a daughter of Omyres, and from their union he got a female child, to whom he gave the name Cretheis. And Melanopus himself and his wife came to the end of their lives, but the daughter he entrusted to a man with whom he had much contact, Cleanax, an Argive.

Some time later it happened that the girl had secret intercourse with a man and became pregnant. At first no one noticed; but when Cleanax observed it, he was vexed at the occurrence, and summoning Cretheis to see him in private, he rebuked her roundly, adding that it put them to shame in the city. So he made the following plan for her.

³¹ Del. Wilamowitz.

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The Cymaeans were just then colonizing the inner part of the gulf of the Hermus; the colony was named Smyrna by Theseus, who wanted to establish a memorial bearing the name of his own wife, for she was named Smyrna. Theseus was one of the leading Thessalian founders of Cyme, a descendant of Eumelus the son of Admetus, and a man of abundant means. There Cleanax placed Cretheis with Ismenias, a Boeotian who had been allotted a place among the colonists, and who was a great friend of his.

Some time later Cretheis went out with other women to a festival at the river known as the Meles; her time was due, and she gave birth to Homer, who was not blind but sighted. And she named the child Melesigenes, taking the name from the river. For the moment she was still with Ismenias. But some time later she left his house, and proceeded to keep the child and herself by manual work, taking employment from different people at different times, and she saw to her son's education as her means allowed.

Now there was in Smyrna at this time a man named Phemius, who gave boys instruction in reading and writing and the other humanities. He lived alone, and he hired Cretheis to card and spin bundles of wool that he got from the boys as school fees. She worked for him, displaying a high degree of modesty and decency, and Phemius was well pleased with her. Finally he approached her with the

³² Add. West.

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proposal that she should live with him; among many other arguments that he thought would induce her, he referred to her child, saying that he would adopt him as his son, and that once educated by himself he would be a person of note (for he could see that the boy was intelligent and highly gifted); until he persuaded her to do so.

The boy was naturally endowed, and with the benefit of attention and education he quickly began to stand out far above the rest. When in time he reached manhood, he was nothing inferior to Phemius in learning. So it was when Phemius came to the end of his life, leaving everything to the boy; not long afterwards Cretheis died too, and Melesigenes was established as the teacher. Being now on his own, he attracted more notice, and earned the admiration both of the local people and of those foreigners who came in. For Smyrna was a trading center, and much grain was exported from there, as it was brought in from the surrounding country in great abundance; so when the foreigners stopped work, they used to spend time sitting in on Melesigenes.

There was among them at that period a shipowner Mentès from the Leucas region, who had sailed in with his ship for grain, an educated man for his time and a knowledgeable one. He persuaded Melesigenes to close his school and sail with him, for a wage and all found, adding that it was worth seeing countries and cities while he was still young. And I think that he was won over by this argu-

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ment above all; for it may be that he was already thinking of setting his hand to poetry. He closed the school and sailed with Mentès. And wherever he went on each occasion, he observed all the local details and learned more by enquiry; and probably he also made written notes of everything.

Coming back from Etruria and Spain, they arrived at Ithaca, and it happened that Melesigenes developed an eye ailment and was in a very bad way. So that he could be looked after, Mentès, who was sailing to Leucas, left him with a great friend of his, Mentor, son of Alkimos, an Ithacan, entreating him to take care of him; he said he would pick him up on his return trip. Mentor tended him assiduously, for he had sufficient means, and much the best reputation of the men in Ithaca for uprightness and hospitality. It was there that Melesigenes enquired into and learned the story of Odysseus. The Ithacans say that it was then, among them, that he became blind; but as I maintain, he recovered on that occasion and became blind later in Colophon, and the Colophonians agree with me on this.

When Mentès sailed back from Leucas, he put in at Ithaca and picked Melesigenes up, and for a long time he continued to sail about with him. But when he came to Colophon, it happened that his eye ailment recurred, and he could not get rid of it but became blind there. From Colophon, as a blind man, he went to Smyrna, and in these

³³ καταλείπει Wilamowitz: καταλιπεῖν codd.

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circumstances he began to essay poetry.

Some time later, finding himself short of the means of livelihood in Smyrna, he decided to go to Cyme. As he journeyed across the plain of the Hermus, he arrived at Neonteichos, a Cymaeon colony, founded eight years after Cyme. There it is said that he turned up at a cobbler's and recited these as his first verses (*Epigram* 1):

Have respect for one in need of house and
hospitality,
you that dwell in the steep city of fair-eyed Hera the
Bride
on the lowest spur of high-forested Saidene,
drinking the ambrosial water of the divine river,
the eddying Hermus, born of immortal Zeus.

Saidene is a mountain lying above the river Hermus and Neonteichos. The cobbler's name was Tychios, and when he heard the verses, he decided to take the fellow in, as he felt pity for a blind man begging. He invited him in to the workshop and promised him a share of what there was, and he went in. As he sat in the cobbler's shop, with others also present, he would perform his poetry for them, *Amphiaraus' Expedition to Thebes*, and the Hymns that he had composed to the gods; and also by contributing comments on things that those present said, he made a great impression on his hearers.

So for the time being Melesigenes stayed around

³⁴ *νύμφης ἐρατώπιδος Ἡρης* Hymnorum codd.: *Κύμην ἐριώπιδα κούρην* Vitae codd.

³⁵ Ita fere Hymnorum codd. et Steph. Byz.: *σαρδήνης* et mox *σαρδῆνι* Vitae codd.

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Neonteichos, making his living from his poetry. The Neonteichians were still exhibiting up to my time the place where he used to sit and give performances of his verses, and they held it in great reverence. There was a poplar growing there which they said had grown up from when Melesigenes came to them. Some time later, however, being hard up and finding it difficult to feed himself, he decided to go to Cyme in the hope of doing better. Before he set out, he spoke these verses (*Epigram 2*):

May my legs bring me soon to a respectful town:
the heart of such men is willing, their devices the
best.

Setting out from Neonteichos, he reached Cyme by way of Larissa, for that was his easiest route. There, as the Cymaeans say, he composed this inscription for the Phrygian king Midas, son of Gordies, at the request of his kinsmen, and it is still inscribed on his memorial stele (*Epigram 3*):

So long as water flows, and trees grow tall,
and the sun rises and shines, and the bright moon,
I shall remain here on this tear-stained tomb
to tell wayfarers that Midas is buried here.¹⁸

At Cyme Melesigenes sat in the old men's saloons and performed the poems he had composed, and entertained

¹⁸ This famous epigram is quoted by many authors. A longer version appears at *Certamen* 15.

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his hearers in conversation, so that they became admirers of his. Seeing that the Cymaeans were receptive to his poetry, and drawing his hearers into familiarity with him, he made an approach to them, saying that if they were prepared to support him at public expense, he would make their city outstandingly famous. This was agreeable to them, and they advised him to go to the council and petition the councillors; they said that they themselves would support him. He followed their advice, and as the council assembled he went to the council room and asked the duty officer to take him in to the council. He undertook to do so, and at the appropriate moment he led him in. Melesigenes took his stand and made the speech about his support that he had made in the saloons. When he had spoken, he went out and sat down, while they deliberated what answer to give him. The man who had brought him in was keen, as were those councillors who had heard him in the saloons, but it is said that one of the law lords opposed his application, his chief argument being that if they decided to provide for *homēroi*, they would have a large, useless crowd on their hands. It was from then that the name Homer prevailed for Melesigenes, from his disability, for the Cymaeans call the blind *homēroi*; so that whereas he had previously been called Melesigenes, this became his name, Homer, and people from elsewhere disseminated it

³⁷ αὐτῶι West: αὐτοὶ codd.: del. Wilamowitz.

³⁸ Var. βουλευτέων.

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when they spoke of him. Anyway, the conclusion of the magistrate's speech was that they should not support Homer, and the rest of the council was somehow persuaded. The presiding officer came and sat with him and explained the arguments that had been used against his application, and the decision of the council. On hearing this, he was disappointed, and spoke these verses (*Epigram 4*):

What a fate father Zeus made me prey to
when he fostered me, an infant on my modest
mother's knees!

The city fortified at goat-rider Zeus' design
by Phrikon's host,¹⁹ riders of furious steeds,
keener than ravening fire to decide the battle,
Aeolian Smyrna, seaneighbor, holy shore,
traversed by the bright water of holy Meles—
going forth from there Zeus' daughters, his glorious
children,²⁰

desired to celebrate a noble land and city of men,
but they in their folly refused the holy voice, the
word of song.

Someone of them will realize when he suffers,
the one who decided my lot by way of insults.
Well, I shall bear the fate God gave me at my birth,
accepting failure with enduring heart;
but my dear legs no longer wish to stay

¹⁹ Phrikon is presumably a legendary founder of Cyme, invented as one explanation of the city's epithet Phrikonis (chapter 38).

²⁰ The Muses.

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in Cyme's holy streets: my great heart urges me
to go to a different people in my debility.

After that he left Cyme for Phocaea, laying a curse on the Cymaeans that no poet of note should be born in the place to glorify the Cymaeans.²¹ Having reached Phocaea, he lived in the same manner as before, performing poems as he sat in the saloons. Now in Phocaea at this time there was one Thestorides teaching boys to read and write, not a good man. When he became aware of Homer's poetry, he made an approach to him, offering to take him in and look after him and feed him, if he was willing to set down in writing the poems he had composed, and when he composed more, always to bring them to him. When Homer heard this he decided he should do it, as he was short of the necessities of life and in need of care. While staying with Thestorides he composed the *Lesser Iliad*, which begins

Of Ilios I sing, and Dardania land of fine colts,
over which the Danaans suffered much, servants of
the War god,

and the poem called *Phocais*, which the Phocaeans say Homer composed among them. Now when Thestorides had written down for himself at Homer's dictation the *Phocais* and all the rest, he formed the plan of going away from Phocaea, because he wanted to appropriate Homer's poetry. And he was no longer so solicitous about Homer,

²¹ This perhaps relates to the migration of Hesiod's father from Cyme to Boeotia before the poet's birth.

⁴² ὀλιγηπλέοντα West: ὀλίγον περ εἶοντα codd.

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who addressed him in these verses (*Epigram 5*):

Thestorides, though many things come to mortals
unexpected,
there is nothing more unfathomable than the mind of
man.

So Thestorides left Phocaea for Chios, and set up a school there; and by performing the poems as if they were his own, he enjoyed much praise and profit. Meanwhile Homer continued to live in the same style in Phocaea, supporting himself from his poetry.

Not long afterwards some Chian merchants arrived in Phocaea, and when they heard from Homer the poems that they had heard often before in Chios from Thestorides, they told Homer that there was someone in Chios performing these poems, a teacher of letters, and that he was enjoying much acclaim. Homer realized that it would be Thestorides, and he became very eager to get to Chios. He went down to the harbor, and though he found no vessel sailing to Chios, there were some men preparing to sail to the Erythrae area for timber. Homer was content to make his voyage by way of Erythrae, and he went and asked the sailors to take him as a passenger, with many enticing arguments likely to persuade them. They agreed to take him, and told him to embark. Homer thanked them profusely and went on board, and once he had sat down he spoke these verses (*Epigram 6*):

⁴³ ἀνθρώποισι codd.: corr. Wilamowitz.

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Hearken, Poseidon, powerful earth-shaker,
ruler of †broad-arena'd†²² and of holy Helicon,
and grant a fair wind and a safe passage
to the sailors, the ship's escorts and commanders.
And grant that when I come to the foot of towering
Mimas

I may find people respectful and righteous;
and may I punish the man who deceived me
and angered Zeus of Guests, and the guest-table.

When they reached the Erythrae area after a good voyage, for that night Homer bivouacked on the ship, but the next day he asked one of the sailors to conduct him into the town, and they sent one to escort him. As he made his way, finding the Erythraean terrain rough and mountainous, Homer uttered these verses (*Epigram 7*):

Mistress Earth all-bounteous, giver of sweet
prosperity,
how well-contoured you are formed for some men,
and for others, with whom you are wroth, how
lumpish and rough.

On reaching the town of Erythrae, he enquired about his passage to Chios; and when someone who had seen him in Phocaea came up and greeted him, he asked this man to help him find a vessel so that he could cross to Chios.

²² We require a place name paired with Helicon. Compare Hymn 22.3, "Helicon and broad Aegae."

⁴⁴ ζαθέου Ruhnkenius: ξανθοῦ codd. Ante h.v. lac. stat. Wilamowitz.

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There was no packet boat from the harbor, but he took him to where the fishing boats moor, and somehow fell in with a group who were about to cross to Chios. The guide went up to them and asked them to take Homer. They ignored him, and put out to sea, whereupon Homer uttered these verses (*Epigram* 8):

Seafarer sailors, who share the horrid lot
of the timorous shearwaters, with your unenviable
life,
respect the Zeus of Guests who rules on high:
dreadful is Zeus' retribution that follows if one errs.

And after they had put out, it happened that a contrary wind arose, and they were blown back and beached at the spot from where they had set forth; they found Homer still sitting on the foreshore. When he became aware that they had been driven back, he said (*Epigram* 9):

An adverse wind has come and seized you, sirs;
but take me even now, and you'll have your sailing.

The fishermen repented of having refused to take him before, and saying that they would not leave him behind if he wanted to sail with them, they encouraged him to embark. So they took him on board, and set out; and they put in on an open shore. The fishermen then turned to their work. Homer stayed on the beach for the night, and next day he set off to walk. His wanderings brought him to the place called Pity's (Pine). As he was resting there for the night,

⁴⁵ καταλαβεῖν Kassel, ἔτι Westermann: ἀναλαβεῖν ἐπικodd.

⁴⁶ Versiculos in prosam dissolutos restituit Barnes.

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there fell upon him that fruit of the pine that some call a whorl and others a cone. Homer uttered these verses (*Epigram* 10):

Another pine puts forth a better fruit than yours
on the peaks of Ida with its windy glens,
where the War god's iron shall be among mortals
on earth, when it belongs to Kebrenian men.

It was at this time that the Cymaeans were preparing to colonize Kebrenia near Mt. Ida; and much iron is produced there.²³

Homer got up from there and went on his way, following a bleating of goats at pasture. When the dogs barked at him, he shouted out, and Glaucus, hearing his voice—this was the name of the goatherd—ran up hastily, called the dogs back, and shooed them away from Homer. For a long time he was in wonderment at how a blind man had found his way to such a place all alone, and what he wanted. He approached him and asked him who he was, and how he had found his way to uninhabited regions and trackless areas, and what he was after. Homer related all that had happened to him, and aroused his sympathy, for it seems that Glaucus was not an unfeeling man. He took him and led him to his steading, made up the fire, and prepared a meal, and putting it before him invited him to eat. When the dogs stood and barked at them while they ate, as they

²³ There was in that region in the time of Attalus I a mighty pine, some 67 metres tall and seven metres in circumference (Strabo 13.1.44).

⁴⁷ Del. Wilamowitz.

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normally did, Homer recited these verses to Glaucus (*Epigram* 11):

Glaucus, overseer of livestock, let me put a saying in
your mind:
first give the dogs their dinner at the yard gates.
It is better so: that dog is the first to hear
a man's approach, or a beast entering the stockade.

Hearing this, Glaucus was pleased with the advice, and wondered at the man. After their meal they entertained themselves with conversation, and when Homer related his travels and all the towns he had visited, Glaucus was astonished as he listened. For the moment, as it was time for bed, he took his rest. But the next day Glaucus decided to go to his master to tell him about Homer. Entrusting the pasturing of the goats to his fellow slave, he left Homer indoors, promising to come back shortly, and went down to Bolissos (which is near the place in question), met up with his master, and related the whole matter of Homer just as it was, treating his arrival as a marvel, and he asked him what to do about him. But his master accepted little of what he said, and condemned Glaucus as a fool for taking in and feeding the disabled. Nevertheless, he said he should bring the stranger to him.

Returning to Homer, Glaucus related this and told him he should go, for he would do well out of it; and Homer

⁴⁸ βροτῶν ἐπιόπτα Suda (βοτῶν Küster): πέπων ἐπιών τι Vitae codd.

⁴⁹ πρῶτος West: πρῶτον Vitae codd.: πρόσθεν Suda.

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wanted to go. So Glaucus took him and conducted him to his master. When the Chian talked to Homer, he found that he was clever and had wide experience, so he urged him to stay there and take care of his children; for the Chian had sons of age. So he entrusted them to him to educate, and Homer undertook the job. And the *Cercopes*, the *Battle of Frogs*, the *Battle of Starlings*, the *Heptapaktike*, the *Epikichlides*, and the rest of Homer's fun poems,²⁴ he composed there in the Chian's house at Bolissos, with the result that he now became renowned for his poetry in the city too. And as soon as Thestorides learned that he was there, he took sail and departed from Chios.

Some time later Homer asked the Chian to convey him to Chios, and he arrived in the city. He set up a school and began teaching boys his poems. He struck the Chians as very clever, and many became his firm admirers. After amassing sufficient means, he married a woman, from whom two daughters were born to him. One of them died unwed, the other he married off to a Chian.

When he turned his hand to poetry, he rendered his gratitude, firstly to Mentor the Ithacan in the *Odyssey*, for having tended him so assiduously when his eyes were ailing in Ithaca: he found a place for his name in the poem, making him a comrade of Odysseus' and writing that when Odysseus sailed to Troy he entrusted his household to

²⁴ On these titles see the Introduction to the Homeric Apocrypha above.

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Mentor, as the worthiest and most upright of the Ithacans. In many other passages of the poem too he honored him by making Athena take Mentor's form when she entered into conversation with someone. He also repaid his teacher Phemius for his upbringing and education in the *Odyssey*, especially in these verses:

And the herald placed the lovely lyre in the hands
of Phemius, who far surpassed all in his singing,
and he struck up the lyre for a fine song.

He also recalls the shipowner with whom he sailed out all over and saw many towns and countries—his name was Mentès—in these verses:

I declare myself to be Mentès, the wise Anchialus'
son, and I am lord over the Taphians, lovers of the
oar.

He rendered thanks also to Tychios, the cobbler who received him at Neonteichos when he came to his shop, by embodying him in these verses of the *Iliad*:

But Ajax came from nearby with his shield like a
tower,
his bronze one of seven hides, made for him by
Tychios,
the finest of leather workers, who dwelt in Hyle.

{From this poetic activity Homer was celebrated around Ionia, and reports of him were now reaching the Greek mainland.} Living as he was in Chios and celebrated

50 { } secl. West.

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for his poetry, with many people coming to hear him, those who made his acquaintance recommended him to go to mainland Greece. He was open to the suggestion, and very much wanted to travel. Realizing that he had composed many passages conferring high praise on Argos, but none on Athens, he inserted into his poetry, into the *Great Iliad*²⁵ to magnify Erechtheus these verses in the Catalogue of Ships:

the people of great-hearted Erechtheus, whom once
Athena
nurtured, Zeus' daughter, and the grain-giving
plowland bore;

and in praise of their commander Menestheus, that he was the best of all men at marshalling infantry and charioteers, he said in these verses:

They in turn were led by Peteos' son, Menestheus.
No man on earth has ever been his equal
in arraying the horse and the warrior men;

and Ajax the son of Telamon and his Salaminians in the Catalogue of Ships he ranged with the Athenians, as follows:

And Ajax from Salamis brought twelve ships,
brought them and set them where stood the Athenian
lines;

and into the *Odyssey* he wrote that Athena, after a conver-

²⁵ This unusual appellation distinguishes the poem from the *Lesser Iliad* mentioned in chapter 16.

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sation with Odysseus, went to the Athenians' citadel, thus honoring this above other cities:

And she came to Marathon and broad-arena'd
Athens,
and went in to Erechtheus' firm house.

Having made these insertions in his poetry and his other preparations, he was intending to voyage to mainland Greece, but put in at Samos. It happened that the people there were just then celebrating the festival of the Apatouria;²⁶ and one of the Samians, on seeing that Homer had arrived, having seen him previously in Chios, went and told his clansmen, commending him heartily. The clansmen said he should bring him along, so he went to Homer and said, "Sir, the city is celebrating the Apatouria, and our clansmen invite you to join them for the festival." Homer said he would, and went with the man who had invited him. On the way he encountered some women sacrificing to Kourotrophos²⁷ where the roads met, and the priestess, displeased at the sight of him, said, "You man, get away from the sacrifice." Homer took the words to heart, and asked his escort who it was that had spoken and to what deity the sacrifice was being made. He explained that it was a woman, sacrificing to Kourotrophos. On hearing that he spoke these verses (*Epigram* 12):

²⁶ A characteristically Ionian festival, concerned with the admission of new members to clans.

²⁷ A goddess concerned with the nurture of the young.

⁵² < > add. Schadewaldt.

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Hear my prayer, Kourotrophos, and grant that this
woman
refuse the love and bed of younger men:
let her fancy be taken by old men grey at the
temples,
whose vigor is blunted away, though their hearts still
hanker.

When he reached the clan gathering and stood in the doorway of the building where they were dining, some say there was a fire burning within, but others that they only lit one after Homer spoke the verses (*Epigram* 13):

A man's crown is his sons, a city's its walls;
horses adorn the plain, and ships the sea;
property enhances the house, and proud kings
as they sit in the gathering are a fine sight for the
people;
but a burning fire makes the house a prouder sight.

Then he went in and reclined and ate with the clansmen, and they honored him and admired him.

For that night Homer slept there. The next day, as he went away, some potters, who were firing a kiln full of fragile ware, saw him and called him over, as they had heard of his skills, and encouraged him to sing for them, promising to give him some of their wares and whatever else they had. Homer sang them these verses, which are called *The Kiln* (= *Epigram* 14):

If you are going to pay for my singing, O potters,

⁵³ λαοῖσιν Ruhnkenius: τ' ἄλλοισι codd.

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then come, Athena, and hold your hand over the kiln:
may the cups turn a fine black, and all the dishes,
and be thoroughly baked, and earn the price they are
worth

as they sell in quantity in the market and the streets,
and make good profits, and benefit me as it does
them.

But if you turn to shamelessness and deceit,
then I will invoke all of the kiln gremlins,
Smasher and Crasher, Overblaze and Shakeapart
and Underbake, who does this craft much harm.
Invade(?) the fire-loggia and the rooms, may the
whole kiln

be in turmoil, with the potters wailing loud.

As a horse's jaw munches, so may the kiln munch,
grinding up small all of the pots inside.

Come also you daughter of the Sun, witch Circe:
mix your wild drugs, and harm them and their work.

Let Chiron come, bringing his horde of Centaurs,
both those who escaped Heracles' hands and those he
killed:

may they hit these works ill, and the kiln collapse,
and the men groaning watch the work of destruction.
I shall enjoy seeing their craft so bedevilled.

⁵⁴ ἡμᾶς. . . σφας ὀνῆσαι R. M. Cook: ἡμῖν . . . σφι νοῆσαι
codd. (σφιν ἀείσαι Suda).

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And whoever peeps over the top, may all his face
be scorched, to teach them all to behave decently.

He spent the winter in Samos, and at New Moon he would go to the most well-favored houses and receive something for singing these verses, which are called *Eiresione*,²⁸ and there were always some of the local children with him showing him the way (*Epigram* 15):

We take recourse to the house of a man of great
means,
who has great resources and makes a great noise,
ever prosperous.
Open of your own accord, doors, for Wealth will
enter
in plenty, and with Wealth, flourishing Cheer
and welcome Peace. May the grain jars all be full,
and the mound of dough ever top the kneading
trough.
Now [give us] beautiful barley meal laced with
sesame

.
Your son's bride will come to you in a car,
hard-hoofed mules will bring her to this house:
as she weaves at her loom may she stand on a floor of
electrum.

²⁸ The term properly refers to a branch hung with fruits and cakes which boys brought to houses at Athens, and probably other places, in an autumn ritual; they were supposed to bring prosperity. See H. W. Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians* (London, 1977), 76; Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge Mass., 1985), 101. On the present poem see the Introduction.

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I'll return, I'll return each year, like the swallow.
I stand at the porch, feet stripped,²⁹ so bring
something quickly.
For Apollo's sake, lady, give us something!
If you will, well and good: if not, we won't wait about,
we didn't come here to make our homes with you.

These verses went on being recited in Samos for a long time by the children when they went collecting at the feast of Apollo.

At the start of spring Homer set out to sail to Athens from Samos. But after sailing out with a local crew, he was diverted to Ios. They did not moor at the town but on the open shore. It happened that as Homer was sailing in, he had begun to be poorly, and he disembarked and lay down on the beach, in a weak state. They stayed at anchor for several days because of unfavorable weather, and people from the town kept coming down to pass the time with Homer, and were impressed as they listened to him. As the sailors and some of the townspeople were sitting with Homer, some fisherboys sailed in at the place, and disembarking from their boat they came up and said, "Now, sirs, listen to us and see if you can understand what we tell you." Somebody encouraged them to go ahead, and they said, "What we have done is leave behind whatever we caught,

²⁹ This is uttered in the person of the swallow which the children carried round on their begging procession.

⁵⁷ καταπλέοντι Wilamowitz: κατὰ πολὺ τι codd. (κατὰ τῇν ὁδὸν *Suda*).

⁵⁸ Add. Wilamowitz.

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and what we didn't catch we're carrying." Or some say that they said in verse,

The ones we caught we left behind, the ones we
missed we carry.

When those present were unable to understand the utterance, the boys explained that in their fishing they had not succeeded in catching anything, but they had sat on the ground and de-loused themselves, and all the lice they caught, they left there, but all the ones they failed to catch, they were taking home with them. On hearing this, Homer spoke these verses (*Epigram* 16):

That's because from such fathers' blood you are born,
who had no rich allotments and grazed no countless
flocks.

The result of this infirmity was that Homer died on Ios—not from his failure to interpret the boys' saying, as some suppose, but from his indisposition. Having died, he was buried on Ios, there on the shore, by his fellow sailors and those of the townspeople who had been in conversation with him. And the following elegy³⁰ was inscribed by the people of Ios at a much later date, after his poetry had spread abroad and become universally admired—it is not by Homer himself:

Here the earth has covered that sacred head,
adorned of warrior heroes, the godly Homer.

That Homer was an Aeolian, not an Ionian or a Dorian, I have shown above, and he also provides evidence as

³⁰ Not in fact an elegiac couplet, but two hexameters.

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follows. A man who is such a great poet is likely, when he describes social customs in his poetry, either to seek out the best ones or his own ancestral ones. Well, now you will be able to judge for yourselves by listening to his verses. To describe sacrificial ritual, he either sought out the best form, or the one that belonged to his own homeland. He says:

They drew the heads back first, slaughtered and
flayed them,
cut out the thighbones and covered them with fat,
making a double fold, and laid raw meat on top.

Nothing is said here about the sacrificial use of the loin. The reason is that the Aeolian race is unique among the Hellenes in not burning the loin. He shows again in the following verses that he was an Aeolian and quite properly made use of their customs:

The old man burned them on splinters, and poured
on the bright wine,
while beside him the young men held the five-
pronged forks (*pempōbola*).

For it is only the Aeolians who roast the entrails on five prongs: the other Hellenes do it on three. And the Aeolians use *pempe* for "five" instead of *pente*.

I have now expounded the facts about his origins, his death, and his life. As to Homer's date, one can calculate it accurately and truly from the following considerations. From the expedition to Ilion which Agamemnon and

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Menelaus organized it was a hundred and thirty years to the settlement of Lesbos by cities, it having been previously without city structure. After the settlement of Lesbos it was twenty years to the foundation of the Cyme known as Aeolian or Phrikonian. Eighteen years after Cyme, Smyrna was founded by the Cymaeans, and that was when Homer was born. From Homer's birth it is six hundred and twenty-two years to Xerxes' crossing, when on his expedition against the Hellenes he bridged the Hellespont and crossed over from Asia to Europe. From that point it is easily possible for anyone interested to reckon the time span by using the list of archons at Athens. And Homer was born a hundred and sixty-eight years after the Trojan War.³¹

³¹ According to the author's reckoning Troy fell in 1270 BC, Lesbos was settled in 1140, Cyme was founded in 1120, Smyrna in 1102, and Homer was born in the same year. The genuine Herodotus, on the other hand, thought that Homer and Hesiod lived no more than four hundred years before his own time (2.53.2).